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TAPESTRY, ADORATION OF THE KINGS
GERMAN, ABOUT 1500

AN IMPORTANT BEQUEST OF TAP- ESTRIES

BY THE terms of the will of the late Mrs. Robert McM. Gillespie of New York and Stamford the Museum has received as a bequest eight tapestries of various sizes and different periods, to be known as the Lillian Stokes Gillespie Collection. The bequest is one of the most interesting yet made to the Museum, and in recognition of Mrs. Gillespie's generous regard the Trustees at their recent meeting, in accepting the gift, placed her name permanently in the list of Benefactors, as was announced in the last BULLETIN.

Of the eight tapestries, three are Gothic, the earliest, illustrated on this page, being an unusual specimen of German weaving

of the end of the fifteenth century. During all the late Gothic period, and perhaps earlier, tapestry looms existed at various places in the Rhenish provinces, but no definite records of the industry have been preserved, and the origins and activities of German weavers are little known. It is generally accepted as true that there were no large workshops, but that monks, nuns, and occasional village craftsmen produced most of the pieces of Rhenish tapestry which have come down to us. The technique and design of all these examples is characteristic—coarser and less skilful than that of contemporary weavers in other countries—while the size of the German pieces, which are generally in the form of strips measuring about three or four feet in height, and seldom very long, bears out the theory that they were pro-

duced on small looms of a somewhat unprofessional character. Such tapestries are rare, and the Museum has had no opportunity to acquire, either by gift or purchase, so excellent an example as the Gillespie piece, which has a decorative interest and charm of color not always found in Rhenish weaving. Its dimensions are three and one half by six feet and the subject is the Epiphany, or Adoration of the Magi, the six sacred personages being shown against an ornamental background of two shades of blue, suggesting bands of cloud starred with small crescents in white, the effect approximating that found in the earliest examples of European tapestry known to exist. The piece is first recorded as being part of the collection of Madam Lelong in Paris, and afterward as belonging to Mr. Henry W. Poor of New York, who is said to have secured it on the advice of the late Stanford White.

The other two Gothic hangings are similar enough in size, scale, and subject to be considered a pair, although obviously not made as such. They were probably woven at Brussels about 1510, and represent subjects of an uneclesiastical character, of the kind generally described as "Courts of Love." In the one illustrated on page 249 a gentleman, seated under a sumptuous canopy ornamented among other things with a suspended mirror, is being plied with fruit, flowers, and wine by the ladies who surround him, while an onlooker in the right foreground raises his hand in a gesture which may or may not mean disapproval of the ladies' attentions. In the back are other spectators who are only languidly interested in the main action. The second of the two Court of Love tapestries shows a lady seated at the right, to whom a gentleman in the central foreground offers a jeweled necklace which he takes from a casket held by a young girl standing near him. Behind these three figures, and a little farther back, are six handsomely dressed men and women engaged in amicable conversation. Both tapestries have narrow borders of flowers and fruit, and are in an excellent state of preservation. Their size is uncommon—they measure about eight feet high by five

and six broad, respectively—and their type, one held in very high esteem by collectors of today. They are especially valuable as pendants, and will be appreciated additions to the Museum collection of tapestries.

A pair of Renaissance hangings, made some fifty years after the two just mentioned, show what a change the new Italian style had caused in all the productions of Northern craftsmen. The border has widened very much and is filled with arabesques and fanciful decorative details, which can be traced directly to classical sources, while the main subject of the tapestry is considered more as a picture than as a flat design, an illusion which the increased naturalness of perspective and chiaroscuro helps to emphasize. The subjects are probably Saint Paul before Agrippa, and Saint Paul Preaching at the River. In the former, the apostle's message, judging from the expression of the auditors, would seem to be unappreciated. In the latter, his audience of seated and kneeling women, one of whom holds a prayer book, is devoutly interested, while in the background his words have apparently borne fruit and he is baptizing a convert at the edge of the stream. Each tapestry measures eleven feet eight inches high by eight feet eight inches broad, and each bears the local mark placed by law on all Brussels manufactures, together with the signature or device of an unknown weaver, who is recorded only as having made a set of hangings, *The History of Jacob*, now at Vienna.

A piece of tapestry equally characteristic of the best productions of Flemish looms during the high Renaissance, is a strip or border, probably made as a side or back for one of the upholstered benches popular at the time. In the center is a medallion containing a classical subject flanked on either side by arrangements of terms, putti, and fantastic beasts. The strip has been slightly cut at one end, but is otherwise in excellent condition, and interesting not only intrinsically, but also as representing one of the early uses of tapestry not often found exemplified by unrestored examples.

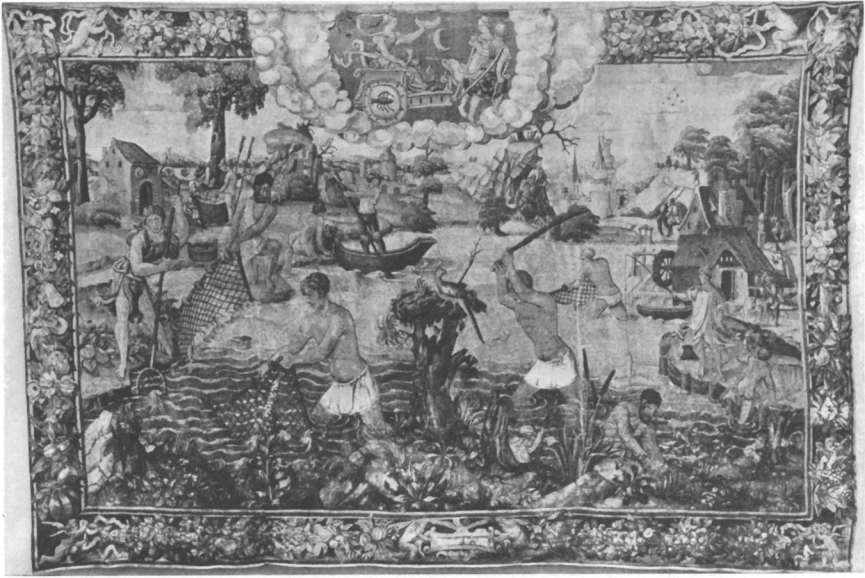


TAPESTRY, COURT OF LOVE
FLEMISH, ABOUT 1510

The largest single piece included in the Gillespie Collection measures seventeen and one half feet long by eleven and one half high. As the illustration on this page shows, the subject is a fishing scene, with lightly clad men in midstream handling nets and other fishing paraphernalia of various sorts. The background of houses, castles, hills, and forests has particular charm, and the tapestry as a whole exhibits a decorative interest of no common order. At the top, surrounded by a band of clouds,

facture, and can be dated in the first half of the seventeenth century. A portion of the lower border is restored, but otherwise the piece is intact.

The latest tapestry included in the Gillespie Collection is, from the Museum point of view, one of the most valuable, being of a kind until the present inadequately represented here. It dates from the latter part of the seventeenth century, and probably comes from the loom of Pierre Van den Hecke, one of the last of the great



TAPESTRY, FISHING SCENE
FLEMISH, EARLY XVII CENTURY

is a device of Diana in a chariot drawn by two nymphs. She holds in her hand the crescent moon with horns turned upward, in the position indicating dry weather, while in the background nearby is another crescent on end, in the position meaning rain. As the sign of Cancer on the chariot wheel shows, the entire device is intended to symbolize the month of June, of which fishing was a traditional occupation. The tapestry was probably made as one of a series illustrating the twelve months, or the labors of the year, a frequently repeated theme in mediaeval and Renaissance art. The tapestry is of Flemish manu-

Brussels weavers. The cartoon is in the style of the painter Van Schoor, to whom a somewhat similar tapestry, with an almost identical central figure, is attributed by the authorities of the Garde-Meuble in Paris, where the hanging is preserved. The Museum specimen represents Autumn, or the Vintage, and shows Pomona, if it be she, crowned with grapes, and holding in one hand an entwined thyrsos. She is seated between two symbolic figures carrying the scales and the scorpion, and representing, the one Libra or September, the other Scorpio or October. The three ladies are dressed in the vaguely classical



TAPESTRY, FLEMISH, LATE XVI CENTURY

manner popular in the late seventeenth century, and are placed against a background of romantic architecture characteristic of the period. In the background at the left is a group of smaller figures, vintagers, who tramp the grapes in the wine-press, and fill and store away the tuns. The foreground shows grape and melon vines mingled in the rich prodigality made popular in Flemish painting by Rubens and Jordaens, while the three central figures are of the full-blown type of beauty so much approved by seventeenth-century artists. The tapestry is finely woven, and is of a texture more commonly found in French than Flemish productions at that period, but its attribution to Brussels can hardly be doubted. The border is a later addition, and replaces a broader one filled with arabesques and

fruits, at least if the tapestry of the Garde-Meuble and a similar hanging in private possession in Paris are to be taken as typical of Van den Hecke's productions. The whole measures a little less than eleven feet by twelve and one half.

The eight tapestries have been hung temporarily in the Room of Recent Accessions and in the Main Hall of the Fifth Avenue Wing, where their merit as individual pieces and as a collection can be readily appreciated. While the tapestries which the Museum has exhibited from time to time have been representative examples, many important specimens were, or are, temporary loans. A bequest such as Mrs. Gillespie's is therefore especially valuable as strengthening permanently one of the most justly popular branches of decorative art included in the Museum. D. F.



TAPESTRY, POMONA
FLEMISH, LATE XVII CENTURY